

9-1-1 Education Month – PODCAST 1

RUN TIME: 5 MIN, 38 SECONDS

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[Sound of someone dialing 9-1-1.]

STEFANIE: It's 9-1-1 Education Month in April. I have with me...

BARBARA: Barbara Vos, I'm the state 9-1-1 program manager...

STEVEN: ...and I'm Steven Ray, and I'm the E-9-1-1 communications council chair.

STEFANIE: Great! So, why is it important that we have an education month about 9-1-1?

BARBARA: Well, it's important so that the public knows how to use 9-1-1, when not to use 9-1-1, and you know, kind of how the system works and doesn't work.

STEFANIE: Okay. Are there a lot of problems with people calling that they don't know how, or when, to call 9-1-1?

BARBARA: Yes, there are. Children are taught from kindergarten on how to use 9-1-1, but they tend to forget as they get older. There are a lot of times when people will call 9-1-1 for something that they think is an emergency, but it really, truly isn't. For instance, over Thanksgiving, they'll call to ask how to cook a turkey. Which really—

STEFANIE: No way!

BARBARA: Yes. Which is really—

STEVEN: Yes. It's common.

BARBARA: Very common.

STEFANIE: Really?

BARBARA: Very common. We try to teach people that if somebody's in danger or in immediate need of assistance – medical assistance – that's the time when you call 9-1-1. Other times, if you're really not sure – for those kind of things, you probably should just call, you know, the seven digit number that most police departments, fire departments, whatever have.

STEFANIE: Yeah, program that into your phone—

BARBARA: Right.

STEFANIE: —so you have it when you need it.

BARBARA: Right.

STEVEN: Right.

STEFANIE: But you're not going to call the police department and ask them how to cook a turkey.

BARBARA: No.

STEVEN: No. We would refer them to the Butterball turkey line.

BARBARA: Yes.

STEVEN: Which we have done in the past.

STEFANIE: That just– I am really surprised at that. I don't– I would never have guessed that people would call to ask about how to cook a turkey.

STEVEN: A lot of your smaller communities, for 9-1-1, traditionally in the past from when basic 9-1-1 started many years back – that was really the only way that those people in that community were able to get a hold of their communications center in the county. A lot of them just called 9-1-1, even if they had a dog running loose, or whatever – they were just encouraged to just call 9-1-1 because that's how they got in. Now over time, with enhanced services, and the true reason behind 9-1-1, we'd like to keep it to emergency-type calls.

STEFANIE: Mmm hmm.

STEVEN: But it's – it's kind of hard to try and transition that – get that out of people's minds. For instance, like with the State Patrol.

STEFANIE: Mmm hmm?

STEVEN: We also have like our help line that's along the interstate – it's an 1-800 number. We encourage people to call that, but a lot of times when it comes down to it, if you really don't have any other way to get a hold of somebody, even if they're trying to report somebody that's broke down, you know, 9-1-1 can be acceptable for that if that's what they need to call, but otherwise if they have any other means to get a hold of us, that's what's encouraged.

STEFANIE: So, say during rush-hour traffic, you know, everybody's on their way home from work and somebody breaks down by the side of the road or there's an accident. Is there a great influx of calls, then, to 9-1-1, at that point?

STEVEN: Oh certainly, yeah. In the early days of cellular 9-1-1, before the PSAPs took them over, the State Patrol answered all the 9-1-1 calls – back and around the early 2000's, when we were taking a lot of those. You would get an accident down on the interstate, or like on 235 here in the metro area – just one accident – and you would get 30 or 40 phone calls on that one particular incident. So it would just inundate you.

STEFANIE: A lot of people trying to do the right thing.

STEVEN: Sure – exactly. And we – you know, we encourage everybody to call. I mean we certainly don't want to just say–

STEFANIE: "Don't call."

STEVEN: "Hey, don't call, because I'm sure someone else is calling." That's not how we want to do this, so–

STEFANIE: Right, right. You don't want to leave it up to someone else.

STEVEN: No.

STEFANIE: So, you mentioned PSAPs – what is a “PSAP” and what is their role in the 9-1-1 process?

BARBARA: Well, a PSAP is a public safety answering point. Sometimes, you know it's easier for us to say 9-1-1 call-center because it's an easier term, but that's the actual name of what, you know, the call centers are. That's where all the 9-1-1 calls will first initially come in, whether it's a wire line call or wireless call. And then it's their job to gather the information as to what the needs are of the caller, and they'll also dispatch either police, fire, EMS or all of them, whatever is needed. And because Steven actually works in a center, I think he could probably cover it just a little bit better than that.

STEVEN: Well, your PSAPs are your public safety answering points, and sometimes there can be several in a county.

STEFANIE: Mmm hmm?

STEVEN: Some of your larger metro areas like Polk County can have – well they have three: they have Des Moines Police, Polk County, and then West Com. Then you have most of your smaller counties where they just have one.

STEFANIE: Okay.

STEVEN: It's either their county, and in some rare instance they – the PSAP may be located at the police department – the largest city in that county may have the PSAP. They're usually the location where not only the 9-1-1s come in, but the 9-1-1s then are also dispatched out – to either police, fire. So it's basically your dispatch center, is what it is.

STEFANIE: Okay. The E-9-1-1 Communication Council – you are on that council. Can you explain to me your role with the council and what exactly the council does?

STEVEN: The E-9-1-1 Communications Council is an advisory board, and it gives recommendations on anything from best practices to what types of, maybe legislation we would like to see enacted. Basically we just make recommendations amongst all the members of the council, which actually have memberships such as APCO, which is the Association for Public Safety Communications Officials, NENA, the National Emergency Number Association, your EMS organizations, Iowa State Sheriffs and Deputies Association, Iowa Chiefs of Police, your volunteer firefighters association, your professional firefighters association, our telecommunications organizations, or TELCOs, our cellular service providers – all these people are members or have memberships on the council and we all make recommendations that Barb, as our program manager can take forward to let those that – like the legislature, whomever know – that this is what we kind of recommend, or what our recommendations are.

STEFANIE: Mmm hmm.

STEVEN: As council chair, my role is, is just to preside over the meetings, and to maybe delegate, um, committees as those might be needed. And I work closely with Barb as the chair, so–

STEFANIE: Thank you to both of you.

STEVEN AND BARB: Thank you.

STEVEN: Thank you very much.

[Sound of someone dialing 9-1-1.]